

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-11 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 ICA-11 ACDA-12 IO-13 /112 W
-----069040 160141Z /73

R 150750Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9695
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY DAKAR
AMEMBASSY MADRID
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RABAT
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GERMANY

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 1586

CINCEUR FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MOPS, PEPR, SS, MR, MO
SUBJ: SAHARA WATCH: OUM DREIGA BATTLE

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 1519

1. WELL INFORMED MILITARY ATTACHE TELLS US THAT OUM DREIGA BATTLE (REFTEL) IS OVER. ALTHOUGH INFORMATION LESS THAN COMPLETE, POLISARIO APPARENTLY WAS NOT DRIVEN OUT OF OUM DREIGA REGION AS WAS CASE FOLLOWING APRIL OPERATION AGAINST GUERRILLAS THERE BY MOROCCAN AND MAURITANIAN FORCES. MOROCCANS BELIEVE TO HAVE SUFFERED SEVERAL DOZEN CASUALTIES. POLISARIO CASUALTIES BELIEVED TO BE LESS. FOLLOWING THEIR DEFEAT AT AGUENIT (REFTEL), MAURITANIANS CONFINED THEIR PARTICIPATION IN BATTLE TO ARTILLERY SUPPORT.

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2. IN CONVERSATION JUNE 10, WELL CONNECTED MAURITANIAN SOURCE ADMITTED AGUENIT DEFEAT BUT OTHERWISE ATTEMPTED TO PUT BEST FACE ON SAHARA MILITARY SITUATION. SOURCE SAIE THAT MOROCCANS AND MAURITANIANS WELL ENSCONCED IN DEFENSIVE POSITIONS AND COULD CONDUCT SWEEPS IN DESERT EVERY FEW WEEKS TO KEEP POLISARIO OFF BALANCE. SOURCE ALSO NOTED POLISARIO'S

FAILURE IN RECENT WEEKS TO DISRUPT OPERATIONS ON ZOUERATE-NOUADHIBOU RAILWAY AND CLAIMED THAT REPORTS OF POLISARIO NEAR MISSES IN RAILWAY ATTACKS WERE MADE UP OUT OF WHOLE CLOTH BY INSIGNIFICANT ELEMENTS IN NOUAKCHOTT OPPOSING WAR EFFORT. SOURCE ASSERTED THAT MAURITANIAN ARMY PATROLS ALONG RAILWAY WERE INCREASINGLY EFFECTIVE AND THAT, IN CONTRAST WITH PONDEROUSNESS OF MOROCCAN FORCES, LIGHTLY ARMED MAURITANIAN UNITS COULD "GO ANYWHERE".

3. VKOMMENT: FROM THIS VANTAGE POINT, OUM DREIGA OPERATION WOULD APPEAR VICTORY FOR POLISARIO, PARTICULARLY IF GUERRILLAS NOT DISLODGED FROM REGION. MOROCCAN/MAURITANIAN DOCTRINE OF LEAVING DESERT TT POISARIO MAY BE SOUND MILITARILY; POLITICALLY, HOWEVER, IT ENABLES GUERRILLAS TO KEEP THEIR NAME IN THE NEWS.

4. MAURITANIAN SOURCE'S COMMENTS ON ARMED FORCES HERE DON'T SQUARE WITH THOSE OF OTHER OBSERVERS. EXPATRIATE SOURCES IN CONTACT WITH MAURITANIAN ARMED FORCES CONTRAST SLOVENLINESS AND INDISCIPLINE OF MAURITANIAN TROOPS WITH RELATIVE EFFICIENCY OF THEIR MOROCCAN COUNTERPARTS, AND, IN CONVERSATION WITH WESTERN DIPLOMAT, MOROCCAN DIPLOMATIC SOURCE WAS HIGHLY CRITICAL OF MAURITANIAN FAILURE TO GIVE MOROCCAN ARMED FORCES BETTER SUPPORT AT OUM DREIGA. DUNBAR

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